(ii) Instead of 10% annual increase in recovery level for PACS for release of financial assistance, 4% have been suggested.

(iii) Government of India should bear 80% of total financial package.

(d) After several rounds of consultation with the State Governments, major recommendations of the Task Force under Prof. A Vaidyanathan with regard to short term co-operative credit structure have been finalized by the Government. The Government of India's share of the total financial package has been increased from 53% as recommended in the report of the Task Force to 68% on an aggregate basis.

Suicides in Maharashtra

3378. SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of farmers in Vidarbha in Maharashtra who have committed suicide since 2001, till date;

(b) the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps being taken by Government to alleviate their sufferings?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) As per information received from the Government of Maharashtra, the number of suicide committed by farmers in Vidarbha region since 2001 and upto 30th August, 2005 is as under:—

Year	Number of cases of suicide
2001	52
2002	112
2003	150
2004	403
2005 (upto 30th August, 2005)	66

(b) Repeated crop failure, rising cost of cultivation and indebtedness etc. are identified as the causes for the farmers committing suicide.

(c) The State Government is providing a financial assistance of Rs. 1 lakh to the legal heirs of the deceased farmers from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

Considering the fact that indebtedness has been a major cause of distress to farmers, in order to enhance credit flow to agriculture, the Government of India announced a credit package on 18th June, 2004, which envisaged doubling of agriculture credit over the next three years. It has, *inter-alia*, also envisaged debt restructuring/rescheduling in respect of farmers in distress and farmers in arrears, Special One Time Settlement Scheme for settling the old and chronic loan accounts of small and marginal farmers; and financing from the institutional sources for redeeming the loans taken by farmers from private moneylenders.

The Government of India is also addressing the varied credit needs of farmers through Kisan Credit Cards. In mitigating risks of farmers, the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme is under implementation. The various measures for augmenting agricultural production and marketing are also expected to reduce the distress of farmers.

Additionally, the following are some of the specific measures taken to help the farmers in the Maharashtra State:—

(i) Credit flow institutional sources for agriculture and allied activities during 2004-05 aggregated to Rs. 8,383 crore.

(ii) Scheme to finance water-harvesting structures on large scale in Vidarbha region introduced. 500 farm ponds have since come up with the financial support from banks.

(iii) 32,600 Self Help Groups (SHGs) were credit linked during 2004-05 and out of which 44% belonged to Vidarbha region.

Private Sector participation on extension and development of agriculture sector

†3379. SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:
DR. MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that for the purpose of speedy development and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.